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First name: Lynn and Vince

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Zachary Peterson:

We live in Moscow, Idaho, and have spent decades camping, fishing, hiking, and volunteering in the forests and mountains of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. Therefore, we are deeply interested in the proposed revision of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Plan, especially if those revisions would open any current roadless area to commercial exploitation or that would increase motorized vehicle usage in these areas. These lands are incalculably valuable as they are[mdash]some of our last remaining wild areas that have evolved symbiotically with humans over the ages and are essential to our well being. They provide indispensable clean water for communities downstream; they clean our air and act as carbon sinks in an era of warming temperatures; they provide essential plant and wildlife habitat for numerous species, some of whom are currently endangered; they provide numerous recreational opportunities in a pristine environment and offer an escape from an increasingly technologized and frenzied world that increasingly places demands on our physical health and mental well-being.

We believe the forest plan should recognize the unique opportunity the numerous roadless areas on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest provide both for current and future generations. These areas should remain roadless and, in the future, protected as wilderness. Because many of these areas are physically connected, if preserved in their natural state they will provide a corridor through which wildlife will be able to migrate for years to come. The areas we believe the USFS should recommend for continued roadless protection (and eventual inclusion into our Wilderness system) are:

1. Mallard-Larkin Roadless area. This area is a favorite backcountry retreat for thousands of people because of high-country lakes that are accessible by a good trail system; its large, old-growth forests of cedar, alder, hemlock, etc.; its pristine creeks that provide clean water for downstream users; and invaluable wildlife habitat for rare species such as the wolverine, fisher, bull trout, westslope-cutthroat trout, etc. Because of these features, this entire roadless area should be preserved and eventually protected under the Wilderness Act.

2. Pot Mountain Roadless area. Like the Mallard-Larkin Roadless area, this area provides excellent wildlife habitat and is a crucial link in a wildlife corridor from the Mallard-Larkins area to areas to the south and east. Not to include Pot Mountain in any discussion of potential wilderness designation would doom wildlife species in the Mallard-Larkin area to a slow death by isolation. Pot Mountain's protection under the Wilderness Act is vital if we hope to maintain a healthy, intact ecosystem on the Clearwater NF. This area also has tremendous hemlock forests on its north and east slopes and open, south facing slopes necessary for providing rich wildlife habitat during winter months.

3. Bighorn-Weitas Creek, Siwash and Moose Mountain Roadless Areas. This area extends the Mallard-Larkin/Pot Mountain corridor that is so vital to wildlife, linking the western Clearwater areas mentioned above to the Selway Bitterroot/Frank Church Wildernesses to the south and to the wild areas of the upper North-Fork-Clearwater drainage to the east. It is also incredibly important in its own right. Weitas and Cayuse creek provides excellent fish habitat for threatened species like the westslope cutthroat and bull trout, tremendous wildlife habitat for numerous species such as wolves, wolverines, fisher, lynx, and a rich landscape for grizzly bears should they ever be allowed to return to this area. The forests are thick in this area, providing an essential carbon sink in this time of global warming, as well as habitat for numerous bird species. This area's two major creeks also provide essential clean water to the North Fork of the Clearwater, and, hence, to the communities downstream who

depend on this water. The high ridges of Moose Mountain provide a challenge to hikers and offers solitude in rarely travelled terrain. Although small, Siwash Creek offers a rare, undisturbed refuge for animals on the south side of the North Fork while also acting as a buffer between the intense logging areas just over Elk Mountain ridge and the North Fork itself.

4. Meadow Creek-Upper North Fork, Rawhide, and Hoodoo Areas. These roadless areas are contiguous and offer a varied ecosystem of cedar-hemlock-pine in the lower elevations, a western spruce-fir forest in mid-elevations, and open alpine meadows on the higher ridges. Because its diversity, this region offers ample room for native species to flourish—bear, moose, deer, elk and many other mammals and birds thrive in the forests, while trout, especially bull-trout, thrive in the pristine streams. Also, Stateline Trail 730, which extends along the Bitterroot Divide, is a designated National Recreation Trail, one used historically by Native Americans and early European trappers. This area also helps link several other roadless areas and thereby provides a migration route for a diversity of wildlife to move freely throughout the upper North Fork country.

If preserved, the above-mentioned areas would protect the magnificent and relatively intact North-Fork-of-the-Clearwater ecosystem for future generations, allowing those future generations to experience natural surroundings that are becoming increasingly rare even in our times. That, to us, will preserve something far more valuable than any wealth we can extract through mining and logging today.

We would also like to include as candidates for continued roadless protection and future wilderness protection, any area currently connected to an already designated Wilderness Area. These areas include the North Lochsa Slope, Rackliff-Gedney, O'Hara-Falls Creek and most especially West and East Meadow Creek areas. Meadow Creek provides pristine water and wildlife habitat, excellent recreational hiking, hunting and fishing, and is the perfect candidate for Wilderness protection. To rescind protections for this area would be as profoundly misguided as any action the USFS can take. Please also protect the Salmon Face and Rapid River areas as additions to the Hells Canyon Wilderness. They aren't large areas, but they are extremely important to the integrity of that Wilderness Area.

Thank you for reading our comments. We know there is tremendous pressure currently being exerted on the Forest Service to develop these lands, but we hope you will not be blinded by narrow interests bent on extracting short-term dollars from these lands at the expense of the immense wealth these intact lands will bequeath to future generations. We must realize that once we alter these lands through extraction of timber and minerals, or degrade them by allowing motorized vehicles to enter them and erode trails, damage meadows and water quality, or further introduce invasive species; we will have lost their magnificent qualities forever. Please do not let this happen.

Sincerely,

Lynn and Vince Murray